



Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Education and Appropriations Committees

House Bill 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status.

February 14, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Lesser and Representative Gilchrist, Ranking Members Senator Seminara and Representative Case, and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Doris A. Maldonado Mendez, I am a Latine born with disabilities, daughter of Puerto Rican migrants, and employed as the Statewide Bilingual Health Information Specialist, Certified Community Health Worker and Public Policy Liaison for Parents Available to Help (PATH CT) Connecticut's F2F with over 36 years of statewide nonprofit service to families and communities with children and youth with special health care needs (CYSCHN) regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic or immigrant status. I also serve as a Statewide Bilingual Guardian ad Litem for Children in Placement, National Family Voices Project Advisory Committee Lead, Husky 4 Immigrants Research Committee member and the Keep the Promise Coalition Co-Chair (to name a few).

Before I testify in **Support** of I support **HB 6616** I acknowledge that All land in CT was once Native territory. As such, it is our duty to acknowledge that many of the institutions where we work or conduct research are indeed on Native land. *Gracias*.

Passing 6616 is a necessary step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all humanely need. Children become adults and if we are not successful early on, they are going to need a place to be supported. If they are not supported by a “village” of healthy adults, we are only forcing them into vicious cycles. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that they have access to health coverage.

Black, Indigenous and People of Color have historically experienced and continue to experience discrimination by professionals. In health care settings, members of our communities face pervasive negative biases and inaccurate assumptions about our value, quality of life, likelihood of survival, capacity to communicate and make decisions. Our families struggle daily with anticipatory grief. As a CHW, GAL and medically complex certified foster parent, I have supported survivors of domestic abuse, genocide, human trafficking and many other foreign and local atrocities while paying taxes (over \$187 million dollars in Connecticut taxes annually) from multiple jobs in search of the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of inequity.

PATH CT is Connecticut's F2F. Family to Family Health Information Centers are a in federal statute and are in all 50 U.S. states and territories. We provide crucial services to families,

providers, communities, and states to better serve children with special health care needs. F2Fs provide technical assistance to state and local governments, school districts, and health systems, ensuring that the maximum of existing health services are utilized. As parents of children with chronic medical needs, PATH CT uses peer-to-peer support to help diverse families connect with wrap around services for their children and family in their communities. We have witnessed how public health insurance for children has a high and fast return on investment with the very families we've served and our very own youth leaders of CT KASA (Kids as Self Advocates).

We applaud the Connecticut General Assembly's early efforts to increase access to HUSKY programs for young children and pregnant and postpartum mothers who are immigrants and would otherwise be eligible for Medicaid or CHIP. In a recent RAND Report, Connecticut hospitals realized savings of an estimated \$63.3 million due to reductions in uncompensated care. CT Emergency Medicaid costs approximately \$15 million in 2021 which would be reduced by the decrease in uninsured undocumented and legally present immigrants. HUSKY insurance coverage would represent 3% of our state's annual Medicaid budget. Most of those costs would be recouped through savings in emergency Medicare and uncompensated care. This extension is an uncontroversial decision, supported by a majority of CT voters. 57% of voters support expanding HUSKY to all undocumented immigrants, including 84% of Democrats, 83% of Black voters, and 76% of Latine voters.

Health care should not be the exception but the expectation. We respectfully urge the Human Services Committee to move to support and pass this legislation. Human rights through health care are one of the greatest human services your committee could endeavor while providing hope, support and a future to our marginalized. Thank you for your dedication.

Estimadamente/Best Regards,
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